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THE NEW PATH.

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TRUTH IN ART.

No. 7.] "Write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are,
and the things that shall be hereafter." [Nov., 1863.

THE OFFICE OF IMAGINATION.

"HE that speaketh of himself seeketh his own glory, but he that seeketh His glory that sent Him, the same is true, and no unrighteousness is in him."—JOHN vii. 18.

THAT art which is the work of imagination is the noblest, not because it gives less, but infinitely more pure fact than is possible to mere topography of external nature. It is, however, of vital importance that the exact meaning of the word, imagination,—when rightly used in connection with art, should be understood. The word is wrongly applied to art, and the faculty misunderstood, when it ascribes to man, as an arbitrary creation, that which is only *through* man by *the* Creator.

There is an ignoble as well as a noble condition of mind, of which the word imagination is predicable. The former leads away from truth—as in Jeremiah, "They hearkened not, nor inclined their ear, but walked in the counsels and in the *imagination* of their evil heart, and went backward, and not forward." Heathen mythology is born of this kind of imagination; it is the contrivance of superstitious fancy ungoverned by knowledge of truth. But healthy imagination gives us the true ideal which is the essential truth of reality—not *material* reality, (which is not reality, but only an appearance)—but *substantial* reality, not of the mere "letter," but of the "Spirit which giveth life." The truly imaginative mind is a *deep seer*, and it only differs from an ordi-

nary healthy mind in being a more exquisitely sensitive instrument. It also differs from the falsely-imaginative mind in that it is always *controlled by knowledge*. It never disobeys natural laws, because it gives only the *essence* of the real. The office of imagination is not to distort the Creator's work, and give us man's fancies of it, but by its deep perception and reverence, to give us the highest truths in their "noblest association." And this work, be it observed, is after all not any arbitrary *contrivance* of the mind itself. It is simply and strictly illumination, and is sometimes "near akin to inspiration." Great truths are presented to the mind's interior vision, which, as an exquisitely polished mirror, it reflects.

And so, after all, it is eminently and only a recorder of truth, and is no more to be praised for fulfilling its functions than the one who is faithful in transcribing the humblest facts.

To those who do not look much beneath the surface, this may seem a degrading view of the matter; but it really is not so. To record truth is a far higher and deeper thing than most men dream. The highest faculties may be employed in it as well as the least; and the higher or meaner faculties *are* employed in proportion to the dignity of the truths with which they deal. The theory of the present school sup-

poses it to be the artist's duty to give us something "better than nature"—he must "select" only those portions that he feels to be most "beautiful," and give us these through the medium of his "feeling" or "fancy." And this feeling or fancy is supposed to be of greater importance than the nature from which he selects. It is true that a picture cannot be right, unless it expresses the artist's feeling; but when this feeling is exalted over truth, it becomes contemptible. The question was put to Mr. Ruskin, "whether is the artist's feeling, or the nature he represents, of more importance in a picture?" To which he replied, "Suppose you were looking through Lord Rosse's telescope, which would you think of most importance to your enjoyment, the telescope or the stars?" The artist is a telescope—very marvelous in himself, as an instrument. But I think, on the whole, the stars are the principle part of the affair. The artist, however, is, when good, a telescope not only of extraordinary power, but one which can pick out the best stars for you to look at—display them to you in the most instructive order, and give you a mute, but somehow or other, intelligible lecture on them. We thus become of considerable importance, but may always be dwarfed in a moment by the question—Suppose there were no stars? And the best artist is he who has the clearest lens, and so makes you forget every now and then that you are looking through him."

The artists who think their feelings of superior importance, never suffer themselves, like the telescope, to be forgotten; but are always thrusting themselves between the spectator and nature with their ignorant notions of the beautiful. With them, truth and beauty are two distinct and indepen-

dent things. But in reality they are one. No entity can exist for a moment without a form; the most exalted beauty consists of essence and form together, like soul and body. They come into existence simultaneously. They are distinct as attributes, but not in themselves independently. Form is the cup which bears the essence of spiritual realities to us. This truth, proves the truth of the Realistic principles,—namely, that absolute truth is the necessary basis of all true beauty and imagination. It will not do to select, with the Purist, only those things which are most perfect and beautiful in themselves, and exclude all other facts; even granting that we know just what things are most perfect and beautiful,—which is not possible to a person who has not studied all truths.

True imagination is that power which can show us the inherent beauty in things that to a superficial eye appear ugly. But false imagination will not condescend to deal with any truths except those which it thinks beautiful.

Seeing the errors which have resulted from an undue and ignorant exaltation of false imagination, it *has* seemed to me that there could never result any good from imagination of any kind. But further reflection showed that it had a noble function. All theories are false which are one-sided,—and imagination is not to be condemned because it has been perverted. Because there is evil in the world by depravity, we are not to stand apart so as to impair our usefulness in it. This is the error of secluded abstraction, and all monkish teaching, such as the writing of à Kempis. While there is much in it by which every one may profit, yet its premises are nearly all false. Because it sees evil resulting from the abuse of man's natural senses,

it condemns the senses entirely. But this is only going from one extreme to another. The senses were created by God and were called "very good." We are not, therefore, to blame them, but to discriminate between their use and abuse. They must not be extirpated, but *regenerated*.

It is the same with this great faculty of the imagination—it must be employed in its legitimate function and not made to minister to pride. It must not be suffered to "mend" the work of God, or nothing but disgrace, and ruin, and death will ever come of it. It must be *regenerated*, and so, however gifted a man may be with imaginative possibilities, he will never produce any good from it unless he *feeds it with truth*.

"First, that which is natural and afterwards that which is spiritual," says St. Paul. Let the artist, therefore, turn a deaf ear to all talk about producing imaginative work, and set himself deliberately to acquire knowledge, "seeking only to express the greatest possible amount of fact." "Let him chisel his rock faithfully and tuft his forest delicately," and the spirit will come upon him when he is not aware, and he will utter mighty truths. All great men have done this. Shakespeare was a great imaginative poet; but what would it have availed him without the deepest knowledge and perception of human life and character in all its relations? He did not select a pretty bit here and there, but gave us the truth of *both sides* of humanity; it being wonderful how he sometimes dignifies what are commonly considered "mean things," and so it is with the great modern poets—Tennyson and the Brownings—who are highly imaginative, but always *intensely* real.

But if the infinite God manifests

Himself to us through the human mind and the forms of nature, how important it becomes that these forms should be faithfully given by the artist, and the degree of the greatness of his work, will be in the degree of its faithfulness and depth.

It is wonderful to think of the world of truth that may yet be expressed by art. Here is a field for subtle thought and powerful instruction, which has its beginning and ending in the glory of Him who is God over all.

When the world is so full as to appear to our narrow vision quite infinite, and each object from the most minute to the greatest, is an expression of a principle of the immortal soul and consequently full of deep meanings, of which we, at present, cannot know the tithe; how useless to waste time in creations of the morbid fancy:

Imagination, is an extraordinary gift, and if we possess it, we must do the "camp work" before we can make it useful. Let us strive to make the most of those talents with which we are intrusted. The finest faculties may lie torpid. The master gives to one man "five talents, to another two, to another one." Let each beware lest he bury his Lord's money in the ground. And if we have been intrusted with five talents, let us take care that when the time of reckoning shall come, we can say to our Master, "Behold I have gained beside them five talents more." And remember that, if we have imagination, its true office is to make itself a "telescope" which shall show us the brightest "stars" of God's creation in their most instructive and high order.

The popular teaching of the last two or three centuries has been in direct opposition to this, but we have seen its results in the artificial extravagance in

which painters have indulged to the exclusion of all vital truth.

Wonderful revolutions are going on at present, and never before in the world's history, have such "deep, penetrating glances" been sent into prevailing principles. The physical wars between nations are the least of the great wars, that are at this moment going on in the world. The *mental*

wars are producing far more serious results: they are shaking the dogmas of men to their very foundations. The "days of the dragon are numbered," and the battles will not cease till Babylon is utterly destroyed. Hereafter all that can endure must be built upon the rock of TRUTH.

III.

WHAT HAS BEEN DONE AND WHAT CAN BE DONE.

II.

• We have given in the last two numbers of this journal, a sketch of the progress of Architecture in America up to the present time. In doing so some comments have been made upon several familiar works, and lest they be taken as criticisms, we deem it proper to add that our endeavor has been solely to make a historical review. If in doing so, we have indulged in praise or censure, let it be understood that we have only given conclusions founded upon good reasons, which in their appropriate place will be stated. At a future day we mean to be critical, and severely so.

And now we come to ask what can be done? Not what will be done, for we are not gifted with the eyes of prophecy; but what it is within our power to do with the means at our disposal, provided always that we go in the right path. Within the answer to this lies the whole subject of our writing, our talking and our work. But before entering upon this topic, let it be understood that though we are the first and only journalistic advocates of reform in America, there are earnest workers in the cause outside the society which this journal represents. Our object is to give form and consistency to the principles heretofore set forth, and create a centre around which all true believers can cling, and in which all can compare opinions, so that there will be unity in the new work, and that strength which always results from it.

The best architecture that the world has seen only culminated after five hundred years of gradual development. Therefore for any set of men to assume to reform the architecture of a country in a few years, would be ridiculous. But there has been a time when a reform did take place; and though the arts afterwards fell from their high estate, they had culminated in such perfection as the world neither before nor since has seen; and this development arose from the unwearied exertions of earnest hard-working Christians, through hundreds of years—laborers who had nothing to work on but what their pagan predecessors had left them. From the sixth to the thirteenth century, whole nations were devoted to the task of making a perfect architecture; and they succeeded, for the architecture of the thirteenth century was perfection in its adaptation to the uses of all Europe, though not altogether adapted to our wants.

How differently are we circumstanced! We have the result of their labors to furnish us instruction and inspiration, and by the aid of modern illustrated books and photographs, as well as the facilities for travel, we have the whole field of the labors of the mediævalists spread out for the study of all. In those days men worked from a pure and holy religious enthusiasm, and the result was that they realized a truly Christian architecture. And that is what we would do. We would have a Christian archi-